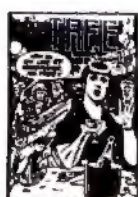


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MS. TREE

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**JOHNNY
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BIG
RACKET**

THE SLUG THAT TORE INTO MY RIBS MADE ME
BUCKLE WITH PAIN. BUT I KEPT THE .45
WORKING UNTIL I HEARD THE SCREAM THAT
TOLD ME MY SLUGS HAD FOUND THEIR TARGET.



Ms. TREE "COMING OF RAGE"



chapter two:
Sins of the Mother
BY MAX COLLINS AND TERRY BEATTY WITH GARY KATO

IT'S MIKE — I MISS HIM — I'M... FEELING BAD... GUILTY... ABOUT SENDING HIM AWAY —

GREENWOOD ACADEMY IS A TOP-FLIGHT PRIVATE SCHOOL — AND THEIR SECURITY IS OUTSTANDING!



I UNDERSTAND MANY OF THE WEALTHIEST FAMILIES AROUND SEND THEIR KIDS THERE FOR THAT VERY REASON.

SHALL WE ORDER?



LUNCH WAS PLEASANT ENOUGH, BUT I WAS STILL TROUBLED.

RAFE, IT'S BEEN TWO WEEKS NOW, AND I'VE TALKED TO MIKE ON THE PHONE EVERY SEVERAL DAYS, AND HE SAYS HE'S ALL RIGHT... BUT HE'S SO... DISTANT.

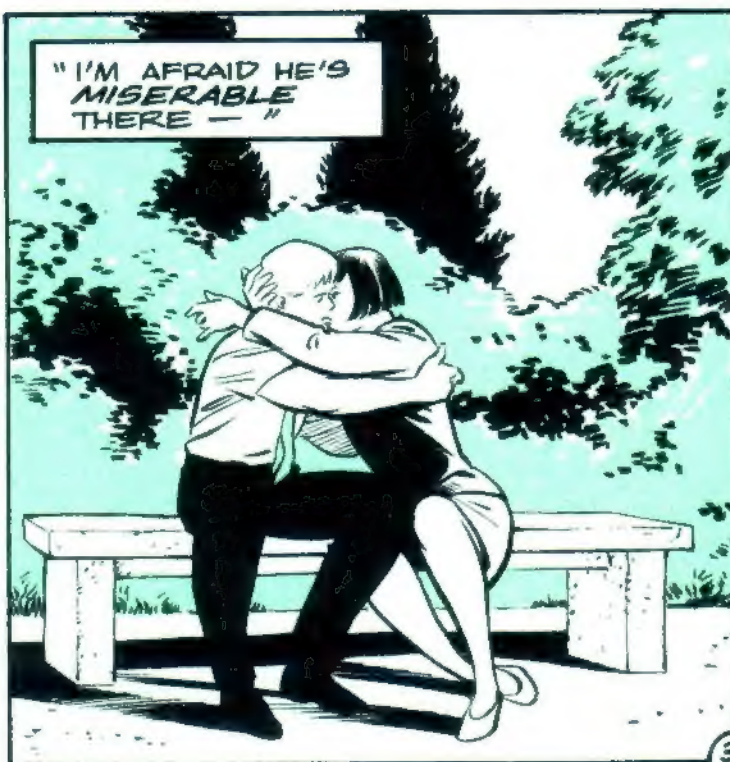
COME ON, MICHAEL — GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO ADJUST —



WE'VE MADE A LOT OF PROGRESS, MIKE AND ME, FROM THE DAYS WHEN HE VIEWED ME AS AN ENEMY — BUT I'M AFRAID I'VE THROWN IT ALL AWAY. HE SEEMS TO HATE GREENWOOD.



"I'M AFRAID HE'S MISERABLE THERE —"







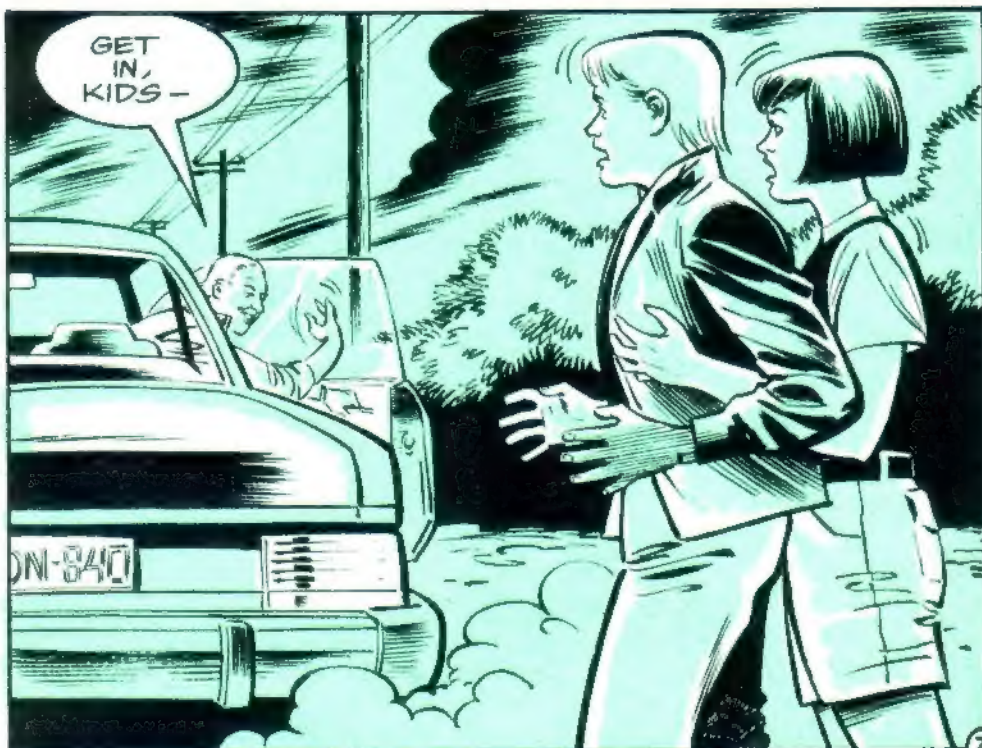
"SECURITY'S TOO TIGHT. LET'S JUST WAIT TILL ONE OF THESE BRATS MAKES A BREAK FOR IT -"



COME ON - WE'LL GO INTO TOWN TONIGHT - CATCH A SHOW OR SOMETHING. OUR ROOMIES'LL COVER FOR US -











UP AND
AT 'EM-

YEAH -
IT'S YOUR
WAKE-UP
CALL, KID -

KISS
MY
ASS-

MIKE--
DON'T...

KIDS, YOU GOT
TO UNDERSTAND
WHAT THIS IS
ABOUT -

THIS IS STRICTLY *BUSINESS* - AND YOU'RE THE PRODUCT WE TRADE IN. SO WE'RE GONNA KEEP OUR PRODUCT IN TIP-TOP SHAPE - NO NEED TO *WORRY*...

YOU SEE, WE BEEN WATCHING YOUR FANCY LITTLE SCHOOL - WE BEEN WAITING TO CATCH A RICH LITTLE FISH -



ONLY WE CAUGHT TWO FISHIES -

YEAH, WELL I'M NOT RICH - BUT WHEN YOU FIND OUT WHO MY *BIG FISH* IS, YOU'LL BE UP THE CREEK WITHOUT A PADDLE, BUD -

OH ? AND WHO WOULD YOUR "BIG FISH" BE ?



MY STEP-MOTHER. HER NAME IS MICHAEL TREE.



BOSS - ISN'T THAT THE LADY P.I. WHO ...

KILLED ALL THOSE MOB GUYS -

YES - YES...







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NEW MYSTERIES



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Primary Target

A Quarry Novel

By Max Allan Collins

When they offer him a million dollars to come out of his quiet, lakeside retirement, Quarry turns the contract down. He knows too well that one does not assassinate a presidential candidate and survive to spend the fee.

But when those who tried to hire him decide to tie off the loose end that Quarry has suddenly become, they make two mistakes: they kill Quarry's pregnant wife, and they fail to kill him.

Primary Target, the first Quarry novel in ten years and the hitman's first hard-cover appearance, is a darkly disturbing political thriller that will shock, surprise, and yet delight readers meeting the laconic killer for the first time, as well as the enthusiastic fans who made Quarry a cult favorite.

MAX ALLAN COLLINS, who lives in Iowa with his wife and son, has written twenty-five novels of suspense, including the four earlier Quarry novels, the widely praised *Midnight Haul*, and the award-winning historical mystery, *True Detective*, with its several sequels. He is also one of the top writers in the comics field, scripting the Dick Tracy newspaper strip and several comic books, including *Batman* and his own *Ms. Tree* and *Wild Dog*.



Spree

MAX ALLAN COLLINS

Nolan finally put it all together. His criminal past is dead and buried, he owns a restaurant in a small shopping mall; Sherry loves him. He couldn't ask for anything more. Then Nolan's past screams into his present. Coleman Comfort believes Nolan killed his brother and he wants revenge—now! Comfort kidnaps Sherry and delivers an ultimatum: Help him pick the mall clean during one late night "shopping spree," or Sherry will die.

Collins, the author of *True Detective*, *True Crime* and *The Million-Dollar Wound* (all SMP) as well as the "Mallory" series, is one of the leading suspense writers in the country today. His work has been praised by critics: "Mr. Collins has an outwardly artless style that conceals a great deal of art." (*New York Times*); "Collins has wit and style and stays on track." (*New York Daily News*). In *Spree*, Collins weaves a tale of crime and suspense as tension-filled as the novels of Lawrence Sanders and delivers it with the speed and punch of Elmore Leonard.

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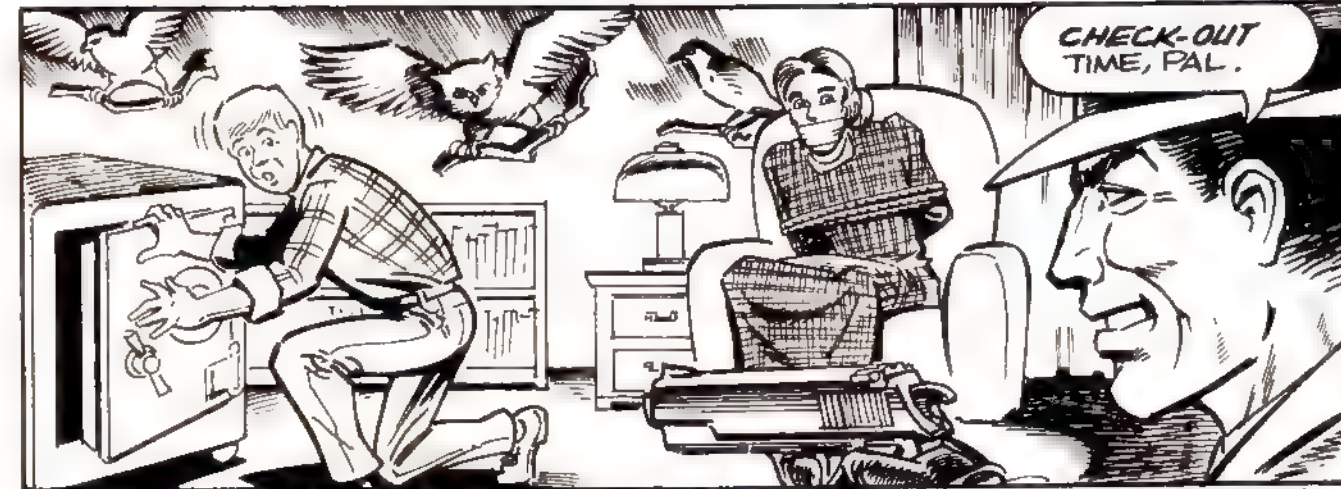
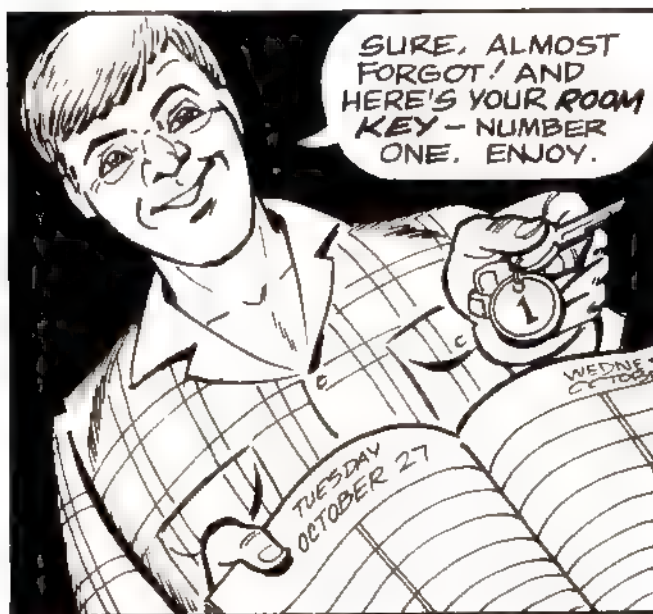
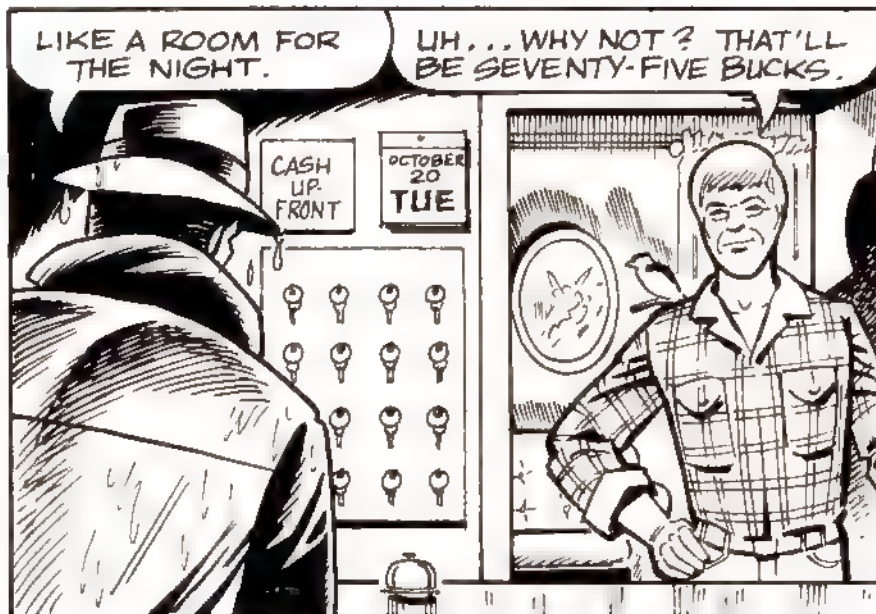
MAX COLLINS & GARY KATO

SOAKED

IT WAS LATE WHEN I FINISHED UP WITH THE MARION CRANE EMBEZZLEMENT CASE - AND THE NIGHT HAD TURNED NASTY -



BUT JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I'D HAVE TO PULL OVER AND CRASH IN MY CAR, A MOTEL APPEARED -



I WAS SUSPICIOUS OF THE MOTEL CLERK WHEN, BESIDES CLIPPING ME, HE HANDED ME THE GUEST REGISTER OPENED TO A RANDOM PAGE. THE OLD LADY WHO MANAGED THE PLACE WAS SO GRATEFUL SHE OFFERED ME A FREE ROOM, I STAYED DOWN THE ROAD AT A HOLIDAY INN.

STORY: BARB COLLINS

COMIC
MEDIA

THIS IS JOHNNY DYNAMITE

DYNAMITE

MEET
JOHNNY
DYNAMITE
the most
famous
comic book
character
in the world
who has
been
killed
and
come
back
to
life
many
times
over



PETE
MORISI

HERE'S THE WILD MAN FROM CHICAGO



JOHNNY DYNAMITE



I WAS OUT FOR BLOOD... AND I'D FIND IT. THE BOYS IN THIS DEAL WERE PLAYING IT FOR KEEPS. I GOT SUCKERED INTO THE SLIME AND FILTH THAT THRIVED ON THE SALE OF HUMAN FLESH... AND THERED BE THE DEVIL TO PAY WHEN I BLASTED OUT. IT WAS BIG AND ORGANIZED, BUT I'D MAKE MY DENT IN THE...

BIG RACKET

THE SLUG THAT TORE INTO MY RIBS MADE ME BUCKLE WITH PAIN. BUT I KEPT THE .45 WORKING UNTIL I HEARD THE SCREAM THAT TOLD ME MY SLUGS HAD FOUND THEIR TARGET.



NOW IT WAS OVER. THE WHOLE FILTHY MESS. I LET THE EMPTY .45 DROP FROM MY HAND AS I STAGGERED ACROSS THE ROOM. THE PAIN AT MY SIDE MADE ME WANT TO VOMIT, BUT NOTHING CAME. I REACHED FOR THE PHONE.



I PUT A CALL THROUGH TO POLICE HEADQUARTERS AND SOMEHOW MANAGED TO GET HENNESSY.

GET DOWN HERE, PAL... THE SHACK... BY THE RIVER... I'M IN A "BAD WAY."



THAT'S AS FAR AS I GOT. THE HOLE IN MY SIDE THROBBED WITH A BURNING FURY, AS I CRUMPLED UP. I TRIED TO CLAW FOR SUPPORT, BUT THE ROOM WAS A HAZY VOID THAT WAVERED BEFORE ME. ALL I COULD DO WAS LAY THERE AND THINK... THINK BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF THIS DIRTY DEAL.



SHE WAS TALL AND TAWNY. AND HER BODY HAD IMPROVED. HER FULL RICH LIPS BECKONED TO ME AS SHE SPOKE, BUT HER EYES WERE FILLED WITH TERROR.

THAT'S IT, JOHNNY. WHEN YOU BROKE UP THE CALL GIRL RACKET A FEW YEARS BACK, I SIDED WITH YOU AGAINST ROCKY GOREMAN. HE SWORE THEN THAT HE'D GET YOU FOR NAILING HIM, AND ME FOR TURNING AGAINST HIM ON THE STAND. NOW HE'S OUT AND I'M SCARED... REAL SCARED!



SO THE LOUSY #!#@!! IS OUT AND READY TO DO BUSINESS AT THE SAME OLD CORNER. EH? THE D.A. COULDN'T DO A THING TO THAT SLOB. HE COULDN'T FIND ANY RECORDS OF HIS HIGH CLASS CLIENTLE OR ANYTHING ELSE. OUR TESTIMONY SENT HIM UP. NOW HE'S GUNNING OUR WAY!

WELL, MR. DYNAMITE I SEE YOU'RE STILL BLOWING OFF STEAM.



THE SNEER IN THE VOICE TOLD ME IT WAS GOREMAN EVEN BEFORE I TURNED TO LOOK. HE STOOD THERE WITH HIS TWO HOODS, SMIRKING.

SOMETHING YOU WANT, PEDDLER?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, COP? GET HIM BOYS! I'LL GET THE BROAD.



THE BIG GUY, CLUMSY AND HULKING, SWUNG WILD. I UNLOADED A ROUNDHOUSE THAT CAUGHT HIM FLUSH ON THE JAW AND SENT HIM SPRAWLING INTO JUNIOR. THIS WAS MY CHANCE.



I TURNED TO TACKLE GOREMAN, BUT THE HURRIED FOOTSTEPS IN THE HALL TOLD ME HE KNEW HE WAS OUTNUMBERED.

HE HURT YOU MUCH, GALE BABY?

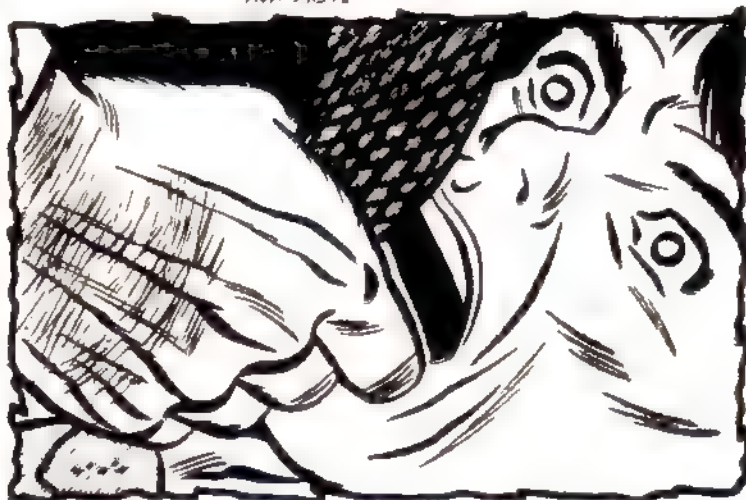
N-NO, I'M ALRIGHT, BUT HE'LL BE BACK! TAKE ME HOME!



THE BIG GUY CAME AT ME WITH A SAP. HE WANTED TO SLOW ME DOWN SO JUNIOR COULD FINISH ME WITH ONE SLUG. THEY HAD TO DO IT THAT WAY OR RISK ATTRACTING ATTENTION.



I GRABBED THE SAP AND HEADED FOR THE LITTLE GUY WHO WAS STILL TRYING TO GET OFF A SHOT AT ME. I LET HIM LOOK AT THE SAP A SPLIT SECOND BEFORE I BROUGHT IT DOWN FULL FORCE ACROSS HIS BLUBBERING FACE. HE MOANED AS THE FLESH WAS LAID OPEN TO THE BONE, AND FELL IN A STUPOR AS HIS TEETH CRUMPLED UNDER THE IMPACT.



I SHOVED THE TWO HOODS OUT IN THE HALL AND LET THEM LAY IN THEIR OWN GORE. I FLAGGED DOWN A CAB AND WE HEADED FOR THE ARMS PLAZA HOTEL. THE CITY LIGHTS BLINKED ON AND OFF MAKING A CHEAP, GAUDY BACKGROUND FOR THE FALLING MIST. GALE SAUNDERS DIDN'T UTTER A WORD THE WHOLE DISTANCE. WE REACHED OUR DESTINATION AND HEADED FOR HER APARTMENT.



THE APARTMENT WAS A PLUSH LAYOUT. WITH SILKS AND SATINS DRAPED AROUND IN PERFECT TASTE. I LIT A CHESTIE AND LET IT DANGLE AS GALE SWAVED HER HIPS TOWARD ANOTHER ROOM.

I'LL ONLY BE A MINUTE, JOHNNY. THERE'S BOURBON IN THE CABINET.



I WAS ON MY SECOND BUTT WHEN SHE ENTERED THE ROOM. SHE STOOD THERE, MOTIONLESS, AND LET ME DRINK IN HER BEAUTY. HER JET BLACK HAIR FELL TO HER SHOULDERS AND PLAYED HAVOC WITH THE MILK WHITE FLESH AT ITS BASE. HER EYES TOLD ME OUR THOUGHTS WERE ONE.



I REACHED OUT FOR HER AND CRUSHED HER RIPE POUTING LIPS TO MINE. SHE KISSED BACK WITH A SAVAGE EMBRACE THAT MADE HER BODY GROW TAUT AND SHUDDER. SHE WAS LOOSENING EVERY MAD DESIRE SHE HAD SUPPRESSED, AND SHE WAS MINE.



JOHNNY, JOHNNY, YOU'RE BIG, AND UGLY, AND CRUDE, BUT I LOVE YOU! STAY WITH ME JOHNNY, DON'T LEAVE ME...



IT WAS COOL THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AND THE RAIN HAD STOPPED. I TOLD GALE TO RUSTLE UP SOME EATS AS I GOT SOME BUTTS. I HOPPED IN A PHONE BOOTH AND GAVE HENNESSY, THE HOMICIDE COP, A BUZZ.



NO, JOHNNY. FOR THE RECORD, GOREMAN IS CLEAN. HE HASN'T TRIED TO TAKE OVER THE CALL GIRL RACKET YET. WHOEVER IS RUNNING IT FOR HIM THOUGH, IS DOING A GOOD JOB. BUT THE THINGS I HEAR AROUND TOWN DON'T SOUND GOOD FOR YOU AND THE BABE THAT SENT HIM UP.

OK, PAL. I'LL KEEP IN TOUCH.



I HUNG UP AND WALKED TO THE APARTMENT. IT DIDN'T FIGURE. ROCKY WASN'T THE TYPE TO PUT EVERYTHING ASIDE AND GO OUT ON A CRAZY KILL. A KILL THAT COULD LAND HIM-----MY THOUGHTS STOPPED THERE. I SAW THE APARTMENT DOOR AJAR. I FINGERED MY .45.



I RUSHED INTO THE ROOM, BUT I WAS TOO LATE. THE PLACE HAD BEEN RANSACKED AND GALE WAS GONE. ROCKY GOREMAN WAS MAKING HIS BID.



THINGS BEGAN TO FALL INTO PLACE. I WAS GETTING THE PICTURE NOW. I BUZZED HENNESSY AND GOT A LIST OF ALL KNOWN HIDEOUTS GOREMAN HAD USED BEFORE HE WAS SENT UP.



I TRACKED THEM DOWN, BUT NO GOOD. I HAD ONE DIVE LEFT. THIS HAD TO BE IT. I CLOSED IN ON A DESERTED LOOKING SHACK DOWN BY THE WATERFRONT. MY GUN WAS READY. AS I GOT CLOSER I COULD HEAR A TORTURED MOAN COMING FROM IT.



I INCHED UP TO THE WINDOW. WHAT I SAW MADE ME FLINCH. I STIFLED A CURSE UNDER MY BREATH AND TIGHTENED MY GRIP ON THE .45. I HAD HAD MY FILL OF FILTHY SCUM LIKE GOREMAN THAT LIVED OFF THE MISERY OF OTHERS. **GOREMAN WOULD DIE!**



I KICKED IN THE DOOR AND SENT THEM SCRAMBLING FOR THEIR GUNS. JUNIOR WAS CLOSEST, SO I LET HIM OFF THE HOOK FIRST. WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS FACE SLOBBERED AND DROOLED AS I PUMPED A BULLET INTO HIS GUTS.



GOREMAN WAS STILL HUNTING HIS ROD AS THE BIG GUY CAME AT ME. HIS FACE WAS A MASK OF WHITE HATE... CRAVING REVENGE.



I INCHED TO ONE SIDE AND LET MY FOOT GO WITH ALL IT HAD. HE DIDN'T YELL... JUST GRABBED HIS GUTS AND KEELED OVER.



THE HULK LAY THERE GURGLING AND SPITTING BLOOD. I TURNED TO GOREMAN IN TIME TO SEE HIM SQUEEZE OFF A SLUG IN MY DIRECTION.



I FELT THE HOT WHIZ GO BY MY HEAD, AND I FIRED INSTINCTIVELY. IT CAUGHT HIM IN THE BELLY AND HE DOUBLED OVER.



UNNNNG! CRIPES! UNGRURG!!



HE LAY THERE MAKING SICKENING SOUNDS. HIS VOICE RASPED "KILL ME. DON'T LEAVE ME LIKE THIS. THE PAIN." I ALMOST SMILED AS I WATCHED HIM SQUIRM. THE SLOB... THE MISERABLE SLOB. THE PROCURER WHO LED THE POOR WRETCHED KIDS INTO A LIFE OF DEGRADATION AND SLIME. NOW HE WANTED MERCY. TOUGH!

I WALKED TO WHERE GALE WAS LAYING. SHE WAS BEATEN AND BRUISED. NOT A PRETTY SIGHT. HER CLOTHES WERE TORN TO SHREDS. I DRAPED MY COAT AROUND HER.



SHE SMILED AT ME AS SHE TRIED TO STAND ON UNSURE FEET. SHE SAID...

THANKS J. JOHNNY... IT WAS KIND OF... ROUGH... FOR AWHILE...

OH, SURE. I'LL BET.



WHAT D-DO YOU MEAN?

DON'T TRY TO CON ME, BABY, I KNOW THE SCORE.



IT DIDN'T FIGURE THAT GOREMAN WOULD GIVE UP EVERYTHING AND RISK THE CHAIR JUST TO HAVE OUR HIDES HANGING IN HIS DEN. HE WAS AFTER SOMETHING **BIG**. AND YOU HAD THAT.



YOU WERE IN PRETTY SOLID WITH GOREMAN TO SPILL AS MUCH AS YOU DID AT THE TRIAL. SOLID ENOUGH TO GRAB HIS RECORDS WHEN THE HEAT WAS ON. HE COULDN'T SPILL TO THE COPS THAT YOU HAD THE BOOK BECAUSE THE BIG WIGS LISTED IN IT WOULD CAUSE ONLY MORE TROUBLE FOR HIM. HE WAS CONTENT TO WAIT FOR HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON.



YOU USED THOSE BOOKS AND WENT WHOLE HOG INTO THE SLIMEY BUSINESS AND RAN THE CALL GIRL RACKET. WHEN YOU HEARD GOREMAN WAS OUT, YOU SUCKERED ME IN ON YOUR SIDE WITH A PHONEV LOVE AFFAIR. I LATCHED ON TO THE DEAL WHEN GOREMAN KIDNAPPED YOU FROM YOUR APARTMENT. IF HE WAS OUT THERE TO **KILL** YOU, HE WOULD HAVE DONE IT **THERE** HE HAD TO KEEP YOU BREATHING UNTIL HE GOT THOSE BOOKS.



THE SEARCHED APARTMENT WAS THE CLINCHER THAT **TOLD** ME YOU HAD SOMETHING GOREMAN WANTED. WHERE'S THE BOOK, BABY?

OKAY JOHNNY, YOU WIN. I'VE GOT THE BOOK MEMORIZED. EVERY NAME, EVERY DATE. BUT ONE THING, THAT LOVE ROUTINE WAS NO PHONEV, JOHNNY... I MEANT IT.



YESTERDAY I WOULD HAVE WANTED TO BELIEVE YOU, BABY, BUT NOW THAT I KNOW THE TYPE OF GARBAGE YOU ARE... I DON'T THINK I COULD STAND THE SMELL.

HAVE IT YOUR WAY, THEN!



I WAS COCKY AND SMART. TOO SMART, FOR I HAD DRAPED MY COAT AROUND GALE WITH THE .45 STILL IN THE POCKET. IN ONE INSTANT THE GUN CAME UP AND SEARED HOT LEAD THROUGH MY RIBS. I FELL BACKWARDS, SHATTERING THE OIL LAMP.



IT WAS PITCH BLACK AND MY MIND WAS FOGGING FAST. THE MOON PICKED OUT A PIECE OF METAL LYING ON THE FLOOR. IT WAS GOREMAN'S GUN. I FINGERED IT, AND AIMED FOR THE SOUND IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM.

THE SLUG THAT HAD TORN INTO MY RIBS MADE ME BUCKLE WITH PAIN. BUT I KEPT THE .45 WORKING UNTIL I HEARD THE SCREAM THAT TOLD ME MY SLUGS HAD FOUND THEIR TARGET.



NOW IT WAS OVER. IT SEEMED LIKE CENTURIES BEFORE I HEARD THE WAILING OF SIRENS AND THE SCREECHING OF TIRES. GOOD OLD HENNESSY ... TO THE RESCUE.

HENNESSY CAME IN WITH HIS BOYS AND CURSED A BLUE STREAK WHEN HE SAW ME LAYING THERE. TOMORROW THERED BE QUESTIONS. LOTS OF THEM. BUT NOW HIS CONCERN WAS OVER ME. THE DOC GOT TO WORK AND MUMBLED 'WEAN ONE, BUT HELL MAKE IT.' I LOOKED OVER TO WHERE GALE SAUNDERS LAY. SHE WAS EVERY FILTHY, UGLY THING THAT I DETESTED. BUT I LOVED HER.



THE END



Address all letters of
comment to:

SWAK
P. O. BOX 1007
MUSCATINE, IA
52761

Dear Max & Terry,

Just finished MS TREE #39 and, although it doesn't sound like you need the support, thought I'd offer my 2¢ worth. I'm actually amazed that long-time readers are giving up on MS. TREE. I'd think that no matter how many pages you offer each month, the story and art quality is what is important and that is certainly enough for me. Compare your situation to CEREBUS, where Dave offers readers insults, tales about how much money he makes, pictures of himself in full color, and as little new art each issue as humanly possible to still carry the story line forward. And 30,000 readers come back for more each time... ? There's an injustice there.

Anyway, I wasn't thrilled by the first couple DYNAMITE stories but I found this issue's well worth the price of admission. I hope your other readers do, too. It's extremely rare that any reader can get a complete story in one issue PLUS a top notch continuing story. That "closure" is nice, even if it is from a reprint.

I wish you guys the very best. I know times are tough right

now with the b & w implosion. But I'll be really surprised if WILD DOG doesn't help MS. TREE circulation out, and I also expect that one of these days your circulation should start climbing as all these new comic readers get a glimpse of MS TREE after being introduced to the medium via DARK KNIGHT, LONE WOLF, and other innovative new comics. I really hope you're still here to see some benefits.

Bud Plant, Rough & Ready, CA

This is about the nicest letter of support we could hope for. As most of our readers surely know, Bud is one of the major comics distributors in the nation. While I've only met Bud a handful of times - invariably at comics conventions - I count him as a friend; he helped turn me on to the underground comic of the '60s, way back when, and was my mail-order life-line to the world of good comics for many, many years. Thanks, Bud!

Dear Ms. Tree people,

Well, at least Ms. Tree didn't shoot anybody in this issue.

Maybe what she should do is only go out with people she doesn't like so that when they are killed or permanently damaged she won't feel so badly about it.

The situation is intolerable. For the first time in months Ms. Tree actually lets her hair down, goes out with a guy who is apparently uncontaminated with any taint of sordidness, actually starts to think a few thoughts that might with some reservations be considered to be optimistic ("Can you blame me for reaching out for a new start? A new man? For wanting the new year to be better than the one that had gone before?") and what happens? The guy gets blown away within ten pages.

I know Ms. Tree has just finished going through mental therapy and is now supposed to be reasonably sane, but I don't think that this type of thing can be too healthy for her. If murder and death persist in following her around at every time of the day or night, won't it result in Ms. Tree's being afraid to become intimate with anybody? Acting cold and withdrawn towards her friends? (That is, the friends that survive, if any)?

This issue sort of surprised me because in most of the Ms. Tree's I've read, the violence was due to some cause, either the Muerta situation acting up again or Ms. Tree going out of her way to seek violence by hiring herself out on a case. In this issue, the violence was random. There was nothing Ms. Tree could have done to foresee it or prevent it. She was totally helpless against it.

If this sort of thing is going to happen all the time, I don't see how Ms. Tree can keep herself together.

I should mention since I didn't, that I like your Ms. Tree very much. I think your stories are very entertaining and usually thought-provoking (that's sort of redundant since being thought-provoking is part of being entertaining).

T Lynne Shalacki, ENGLISHTOWN, NJ

I'm afraid if Ms. Tree's life were more normal and less eventful, we'd be out of business. Her new boy friend was not killed, in #35, and should be showing back up one of these days. Thanks for your letter.

Dear Max,

I read issue 39, like I told you I would, and enjoyed it thoroughly. It's stories and art like this that makes it hard for me to drop the book. Once again, my loyalty to you is there. The reason the book was so good was its surprises and Ms. Tree's brashness. One of these days, it's going to be the end of her. As a matter of fact, I

thought it was her end, this issue. But, like always, our heroine awakes relatively without a scratch. For now she's all right, but for some reason, I keep getting this feeling that her luck will sooner or later run out.

Regardless of that, I've got to congratulate you on something that has never been done before. You, Max, have accomplished something that NO OTHER WRITER HAS EVER DONE (to my knowledge) IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS. This incredible feat can be seen on page 7, second frame, where Angie uses the word "posers."

"Posers?" you ask. What is this boy talking about? What's so significant of that solitary word? Well, contrary to all past attempts, you Max Collins - have used a slang word that is still in use! Do you realize the significance? All other comics fail miserably when they try to "talk" like a teenager. "Like... fer sure. Totally. Groovy, man." No one has ever succeeded in the past. All other attempts are usually dated as ancient history when they appear. Heck, I'm sure if you look hard enough you'll find someone break-dancing in one of Marvel's comics. That's how bad it is. Ah, but Max. You and only you have successfully used a non-dictionary word that is still in use. Congratulations. (I'd also like to commend Terry on correctly portraying just what Angie's type looks like. As a matter of fact, I just broke up with a girl that looks a little like Angie but let's not bring that up.)

As for Johnny Dynamite, well, I don't hate it. I don't think it's too great, either. I do, however, think it's funny. You said that "Excuse for Murder" was a pre-code story, wasn't it? It seems that before the code, they were just as bad as they are now. In fact, I don't think I've ever seen so many vices packed into eight pages! We've got everything from suicide to murder to heroine to marijuana to blackmail to rape (but back then, they thought that if you smoked marijuana, you'd automatically be hooked to heroin). Wow. And to think I was going to spend money on Byrne's Superman.

Chns Romano, PACIFIC PALISADES, CA

Chris, thanks for the boss letter, dude. My main man Terry Beatty and me are freaked out by your bitchen "with it" rap.

Dear Max and Terry,

Well, people seem to be complaining about the new format alot in the letter pages. Half new, half reprint. After waiting a few issues, I have to say I don't like the situation either. Not just because it is a reprint. It is the stories. While the "Johnny Dynamite" story in #38 was interesting, the current one in #39

and rest just seem blah. Both of you do a much better job on Ms Tree than you think if you two compare DYNAMITE to the main story.

Now this does not mean I will stop buying MS TREE. No way in hell. I like the book too much for that to happen. I been following Ms Tree from the beginning and I am not about to stop.

But this does not mean I have to be overjoyed with the addition of Dynamite Terry. I can understand your frustration. But you should also understand your fans' frustrations. Economics is a part of life (along with death and taxes). People are not going to be happy paying \$24 a year for only 12 chapters of Ms Tree. Your threat of going to 4 issues a year will probably have to occur. Personally, I would not be that upset with 6 issues a year of complete Ms Tree featuring two stories. At \$2 an issue, that would equal the same amount of chapters for \$12. I will buy MS TREE regardless of format. As for suggestions to replace Dynamite, Frank Miller, why not Frank Miller (just kidding Terry, please put down your pitchfork). Realistically, how about a Ms Tree short story with a few illustrations tossed in. You could start with the text stories that appeared in THE FILES OF MS TREE which I am sure that most of your readers have not seen (including myself) and go on from there. It could also be a serial that might be collected into novel form eventually. If not Ms Tree, another character.

On to other matters. Have any of you seen the new DRAGNET movie? How did you feel about it? I really enjoyed it. While it was a parody and campy, the substance was treated with reverence that was lacking in the Batman tv show. The little touches were great, like Friday's former partner being named Frank Smith.

Just finished THE MILLION DOLLAR WOUND. One word - awesome!

J Alexander Hall, SANTA CLARA, CA

Your idea of serializing a MS TREE novel in these pages is not a bad one - and, if I ever write a prose MS TREE novel, I may take you up on it. But despite the various messages from Terry and me, I'm afraid the economics of our situation just haven't sunk in to some of our readers. We can't afford to do a completely new issue of MS TREE for the revenue that would be generated, at current circulation levels. In other words, even if we published six times a year, rather than twelve, it would still be in this format. We're not the only creators who are learning this bitter lesson, to keep the wonderful MR MONSTER afloat, Michael Gilbert is switching publishers, going to black-and-white, and offering a package similar to ours (a reprint back-up feature with approximately the same amount of new material as you'll find in MS TREE). And books like MS TREE and MR MONSTER are among the strongest sellers in the field. If you like comics that are different from (and often more adult than) mainstream Marvel/DC comics, bite the bullet and support us, and MR MONSTER and other good beleaguered books. One ray of hope for such comics is the repackaging of material, and such as the forthcoming MS TREE paperback collections from Paperjacks, and the collected SILENT INVASION (a great comics series) which I understand is coming from NBM.

Dear Max & Terry,

It is strange to find the people who are putting together one of the best comics around, on the defensive and apologizing for their operations. If we mourn the loss of extra pages for Ms Tree, it isn't that we want you to starve to death. It's because we enjoy your work and don't want to see less of it.

As for the publishing schedule, it is expected that a monthly come out once a month. If MS TREE came out only 9 times a year, I wouldn't like it any less. But I still would expect a New Year's Eve story to be out before St. Patrick's Day. (Oh, the dangers of doing a holiday theme story can be far worse than attending a holiday sale.)

An erratic publishing schedule won't discourage me as long as the goods are there when the issues come out. And reprints of "Johnny Dynamite" won't make me stop from buying as long as they are good. And that seems to be a cue to get off the soapbox and start talking about comics.

Now that we're into the early Johnny Dynamite stories, it's not so bad losing some pages of Ms Tree. The reprint stories aren't great, but have the charm of unpolished gems.

The homage to "Dragnet" is just wonderful. All that's missing thus far is an opening. "The story you are about to read is true." I do hope that the closing will have something along the lines of "In a moment the results of that trial."

I've noticed in several pages of the past three issues, some panels which appear to be taken from photographs. The first page of issue #39 is an example. While there's no denying the feel of reality in these panels, they sometimes come off looking strange. Also, page 7 looks very different from what Terry Beatty and Gary Kato deliver, especially with the top panel. The scene looks like a partying rock club, and no cameos of celebrities making a quick appearance so we get the idea of the place's importance.

Should anyone decide to do a comic book series on Dragnet, it hopefully will feature work by Max, Terry, & Gary. Unless that would interfere with Ms Tree.

Hurricane Heevan, VAN NUYS, CA

The previous letter asked me about the DRAGNET movie, and, while I was disappointed with the flimsy story, I will warmly endorse the film, which I found to be an affectionate, respectful comic version of the classic cop drama. Akroyd was particularly good - and respectful - and, hell, just seeing that 714 badge as big as a house, during the opening credits, was worth the price of admission for me. But "Like Father" - while obviously paying homage to Jack Webb and Joe Friday - is a P.I. tale, we weren't doing a DRAGNET pastiche. As for our publishing schedule, we've been erratic of late, but are attempting to get back on track. Now that Terry and I are working on WILD DOG again (for the forthcoming ACTION weekly), Gary Kato is bringing his considerable talents to the feature in a more major way. I love Gary's art and am proud to be associated with him on this book. I know Terry feels the same way. I don't know if Gary will use photocopies in the manner Terry does, but I like what Terry's been doing in that department - and those who think he merely pastes up a photocopy to save time don't realize what a "multi-media" event the process is. Those background photocopies have been completely inked and reworked by Terry. I like the noir flavor they bring the feature. And for the record, we'd like to thank Lynn "Sam" Myers for providing many of the photographs of the Bradbury Building (although Terry visited the location himself before the story went into production).

Dear Max and Terry,

I don't know about anyone else, but I like hearing from Terry in the lettercol! But seriously, I appreciate Terry's frank words and I hope that the air has been cleared over the format change, after the discussion of the matter in #40. I guess when you come right down to it, certain readers were not happy with the change and it is their right to feel that way but at least now everyone hopefully understands the reasons behind the decision and does not take it for something it was not intended to be. But, on to more pleasant matters.

Wow! I won the booby prize in the Mike Mist contest. When does it arrive in the mail? What is it? I'll bet it's something really nice! Why is everyone snickering like that?

Still, I'm pleased that my entry was judged **special** in **some** way! I don't win so many prizes in life that I ever refuse one, even if it is a booby prize! (Though given the discussion that Max and I had in a few lettercols some issues back, perhaps it should be called the hootery prize.)

And, oh yeah, there were some comic book **stories** in #40 too, weren't there?!

Blue can be a "cold" colour and its use in "Like Daughter" was certainly appropriate in that sense, for the proceedings certainly were **cold**. Though Ms Tree "won" the case, it doesn't **feel** like a victory. Maybe this is because the reader was not drawn into the story as much as might be desirable. Given who Michael's father "really" was, you could not show him and this was a definite drawback. We never got to know him as a person and thus could not feel his loss as acutely as Ms. Tree did. He was not a real person to us, merely some phantom or, at the best, the television memory of him that was sparked in our minds did not connect with Ms. Tree and her world in a true sense.

Still, though the story did not have the "warmth" of personal involvement, it still has intensity -- though it was more the intensity of the relentless pursuer (as opposed to the grieving daughter). Maybe this was intended by you (in keeping with Ms Tree's "cold" reputation) or maybe I somehow misread the situation. In any event, it was a satisfactory tale, with the ending being quite good - suspenseful, surprising, and even somewhat gratifying (in the identity of Michael's ultimate rescuer).

The Johnny Dynamite story also had an effective conclusion. It was **very** neat. Johnny kept his promises, got some satisfaction

(such as it was) out of the situation, and "justice" was done. It was almost **too** neat. But sometimes things **do** work out that neatly in life. (And, of course, things didn't really "work out" totally for Johnny -- he lost a lot in that outcome, not the least being a few illusions that he had had.) If I am not yet quiet enamoured of this feature, I can still say that this was the best installment so far and I might yet really be won over by ol' JD.

T.M. Maple, WESTON, ONT.

T.M., it's possible that in getting used to the new format, I was not able to draw from "Like Father" all of the story's possibilities - twelve pages per issue cramps my style, although I feel I am getting used to it. the current story is flowing nicely, I think. Also, I think if you look back at the first chapter of the following story, "Coming of Rage," some of the emotion you say is lacking can easily be found (By the way, T.M., I am holding your capital punishment letter and hope to use it in a forthcoming SWAK.)

Dear Max and Terry,

This letter should make a pleasant change from some which you have been featuring in SWAK lately. I have only just started reading MS TREE (with no. 37) and I have been so impressed with what I've seen that I fully intend to carry on reading this book, no matter whether you print 12 pages of "Ms. Tree" or 22. There, does that make you feel better?

I have read back to issue 19 and in a very short time, I have come to feel quite fond of Michael Tree. Despite her proclivity to violence, and even when her body-count was rivaling Rambo's, before her spell in the "funny farm," I couldn't help but feel drawn to her. Michael's extreme response to physical intimidation coupled with her obvious sense of fairness, proved an irresistible combination. I admire the philosophy the lady espouses while simultaneously wishing (as I like to think Ms. Tree does) that there were another way of resolving the "problems" she runs into so often.

I have become very interested in the supporting cast in Ms. Tree, too, and while they have not played much part in the current story, I hope to see more of Roger, Effie and Dan. Speaking of "Like Father," the thing that has struck me most forcibly is Michael's lack of (apparent) emotion over the killing of her father. I believe the tears will come, maybe in private, maybe on Angie's shoulder (this would be nice), when the case is cracked. I would like to repeat some previously given praise regarding your handling of fight scenes in Ms. Tree. The "scuffle" in the alley at the close of this issue (no. 39) was very credibly done, unlike most of the fights in comics. The death of Cracken tempts me to believe that Lt. Strout is panicking. I think the conclusion next month should be pretty interesting (though not necessarily pretty).

As I said, I am prepared to make do with 12 pages of "Ms. Tree" per month, if this is the best that you can do. Obviously, I would rather have full length Tree stories, but if that cannot be, okay. The "Johnny Dynamite" strips are fun to read but not something I can get really excited about, I'm afraid.

Finally, I must mention the pleasant surprise I had while reading through the back-issues. Thanks to T.E. Pouncey for the mention in the letters column of issue 22. I hope T.E. is wrong and that Ms. Tree CAN survive in its present form. I'd hate to have to do without my new-found friend now that I've finally found her.

Dale Coe, WARRINGTON, CHESHIRE ENGLAND

*Dale, I have been concerned about the lack of attention our supporting cast has been getting of late, and am doing something about it. As you've seen, "Coming of Rage" has had Mike Jr. at its center much of the time. And the next serial - a full, four-issue number - will focus on **everybody**, including Mike Mist as the entire cast goes on a "Murder Cruise." Thank you for your support, and your fine letter.*

Dear Max & Terry,

Having just read MS TREE 39, the storyline of which was as excellent as usual, a few words on various topics arising in the letter column, if I may - after all, this is the most stimulating lettercol in comics!

First of all, I hope you've got over your breakdown - did you meet Michael whilst under treatment? Seriously, it seems to my inexperienced eyes that most comics professionals work too hard for too long, with the compensation being that they are at least doing

something they enjoy, so whatever you do, don't burn out; Nate Heller, Ms. Tree and Wild Dog need you!

I was very surprised to find Chris Romano's name at the bottom of that letter, as my previous impressions from reading his letters was that he was quite a reasonable guy - I don't suppose this is a put-on? Apparently not, judging from your reply. I didn't think that Chris (doesn't Christopher mean "love of Christ"? ironically inappropriate) counted amongst the Ed Meese moral fascist brigade, but he appears to be extremely intolerant, narrow minded and right wing in his views. Again, I'd reiterate that I don't think it does anyone any good to print letters from those who go round using prejudiced name-calling, even if ungrammatically. I think Chris would be a bit upset if he were federally executed for drugs or parking tickets, whether or not "Us Californians" (sic) wanted it or not.

As for the alteration in format, I fear it will lose you a number of readers, although I suspect some of them won't have even tried "Johnny Dynamite," which I quite enjoy (but not as much as Ms. Tree's adventures) on more careful perusal. This may put you on a downward spiral whereby Terry will even less be able to afford to draw "Ms. Tree." Personally I'd prefer you to stick to a monthly comic in the current format, but I wouldn't be surprised if economic necessity demands a series of mini-series. I will certainly support the comic, and continue buying and recommending it, whatever format you decide upon, but I'm in the lucky position of not having to restrict my own purchasing of new comics, for financial reasons, very much. I also believe in supporting smaller print-run comics, providing they're good enough, knowing that their nature means a higher cover price, but not everyone takes that view. I hope that your sales continue to increase, despite less pages of lead story. This comic figures amongst my favourites list too. I fully understand Terry's plight, and I hope that WILD DOG becomes very successful, as it deserves to. In turn, this might increase readership on MS TREE, with a bit of luck. I do very much like T.E. Pouncey's suggestions - are you sure they're all impractical? I'm sure Frank Miller would do the odd free back up feature - oh, you mean **that** Frank Miller, I thought you were talking about this kid who lives down my road..

Malcolm Bourne, LONDON, ENGLAND

*Malcom, Chris has remained a supporter of the book, as you've no doubt seen here in SWAK. T.E. Pouncey and a few others, who'd previously supported the book, left in a huff - or was that a minute and a huff? But that's their right. Also, some of the suggestions readers like Pouncey made were indeed impractical, but nonetheless they were (despite our snickering in SWAK) appreciated. J. Alexander Hall's suggestion about a serialized MS TREE prose novel is not bad at all. How would readers feel about **non** MS TREE Collins fiction serialized here, with a spot illo here and there from bEatty and/or Kato?*

DEAR Zeebster Max,

First, I must apologize for being such a pest to you at the Chicago Comicon. In case you've forgotten, I'm the one who asked you for your professional opinion on that obscene little mini-comic I wrote, "IN APPREHENSION HOW LIKE A GOD." So, what did you think of it? If you really hated it let me know, and let me know the specific reasons so that I may not make the same mistakes again. If you really, really liked it, I would equally like to know the reasons why so that I may continue to produce such high quality work. I'm very anxious to hear any thoughts you may have on both the story and art.

Second, you told me that if I didn't hear from you, I should write you and, again, ask for a copy of one of your original comic book scripts. So, could you please send me a copy of one of your original comic book scripts? Not only would I treasure it as an invaluable possession, but I would learn a great deal on how a comic book is written.

Finally, I would like to thank you for taking the time to bother with me. If you have any tips for a writer such as myself, I would be grateful beyond any mere expression of words.

Zeebster Keith Kole, CHICAGO, IL

Keith, I thought your mini-comic "In Apprehension How Like a God" was a powerful piece of work, thanks for sharing it with me. As for the request for an original script, I'm going to have to decline, even though I seem, in a weak moment, to have indicated otherwise to you in person. I just don't have time to

answer such requests (which are more numerous than you might imagine). I try to be helpful to beginning/aspiring writers, and even do some seminar teaching now and then (but not in comics - not yet anyway); but, short of catching me at a con, you're out of luck... I'm too busy trying to teach myself to write to be much help to anybody else.

By the way, the reason Keith refers to himself - and to me - as a "zeebster" is that Chicago DJ Steve Dahl, of the top-rated LOOP radio station, dubbed all comics fans "zeebsters" (or was it "zeepsters") when I was on his (and Garry Meier's) show last June. MS. TREE was much discussed on my two Dahl/LOOP appearances, as a friend of Steve's is a major MS. TREE fan and had primed the controversial (and funny-as-hell) jock on the subject.

Dear Max,

Count this a vote in favor of the present format of MS. TREE. I am enjoying the "Johnny Dynamite" stories almost as much as the lead feature, and am looking forward to the future stories.

I've been following "Ms. Tree" from the start, and enjoy your present mixture of story types, ranging from the topical to whodunnit stories like the present "Like Father" very much.

I am also grateful that this title has brought your mysteries to my attention. I especially enjoy your period mysteries set in the 1930s and 40s, which is a time of great interest to me. I'm a great fan of the pulps, the crime and adventure films (especially serials) of the period, the comic strips, and radio shows. Although many film makers and fiction writers have sought to recapture this period, they often seem to let anachronisms creep in (many quite glaring). You seem to have done your research, and have avoided this problem.

I have also been enjoying your work on TRACY very much indeed. It is gratifying that so many TRACY reprints have been available the last few years, both of your work and Gould's. A few years back you referred to the TRACY feature films in the Dick Tracy rogues' gallery in the Sunday strip. Have you ever seen the serials? Although they have changed Tracy to an F.B.I. agent, they have much of the feel of the strip in the 1930s, especially the second and third serials. I am looking forward to many years of entertaining reading by you in all the media in which you work.

James R. Vogus, ERIE, PA

James, your letter is much appreciated. I'm glad you like the attention to detail in the Heller and Ness novels; a few anachronisms creep in, I'm sure, but I try to be careful about such things. The new TV series PRIVATE EYE, set in 1956, included in its opening moments the word "freaking" (replacing the real "f" word), and immediately shattered my suspension of disbelief; and what followed was more of the same. Fabian's picture on the wall in a d.j.'s office (in 1956) and on and on. I of course have seen the TRACY serials, in which he is portrayed as a G-man; but the second one - DICK TRACY RETURNS, I believe it is - is a corker, with Tracy up against a variation of the Barker family. By the way, about twice a year somebody in the media calls me to ask me what Tracy's brother's name is (it's Gordon - and that character never appeared in the strip, only in the first serial).

To the readers of MS. TREE:

I can very much relate to the reasons given by T. E. Pouncey and Rick Kelsey for no longer buying MS. TREE in the letter column of #39. I had recently been thinking along similar lines and was about to drop the title very soon.

But then I went to the San Diego Comic-Con and attended a panel discussion on how to break comics out of their subculture "ghetto" and into the mainstream of readership. Max Allan Collins was on this panel and successfully defended MS. TREE as a book that can appeal to readers outside of comics fandom. The debate was quite lively, with the general consensus of the panelists being that only outstanding comics can ever bust us out of our prison of underappreciation.

This, of course, made me realize just what is at stake with MS. TREE. It is one of a select few books that have the potential of expanding the role of comics in this country (Others would be LOVE AND ROCKETS and FLAMING CARROT). Private eye fiction like that found in MS. TREE **does** appeal to millions of non-comics readers (as the buyers of Max's novels should attest), but it must continue to exist if it is to be found by them.

MS. TREE desperately needs the support of its readers. I am willing to spend a little more each month to support the cause of helping this book find its readership. I believe it is inevitable that it will be discovered by America at large and heighten the level of awareness about comics as a serious art form.

I am still uncomfortable with only getting 12 pages of Ms. Tree (13 if you count the cover, though even that is being encroached on by Johnny Dynamite), but the quality of story and art has not diminished. The "Dynamite" stories do not greatly appeal to me, but I find the discomfort a small price to pay while investing in the eventual elevation of comics to mainstream status.

If it has become economically mandated that 12 pages are all Max and Terry can produce each month, then I will continue to enjoy the stories that are in MS. TREE and try not to miss too badly what is not there.

So come on, fans. Let's stick with MS. TREE through the tough times, which are indeed tough times for all black-and-whites (though MS. TREE is arguably the best of them all), and maybe someday Renegade can afford to publish it as a 75¢ 22-page color comic.

Monty Wirth, DURKEE, OR

Thanks, Monty. The Paperjacks collections (the first of which should appear in 1988) may help us fight the good fight (jeez, I'm getting all misty-eyed - or is that Mike misty-eyed...).

Dear Barb, Max and Terry,

I just want to say thanks for the autographed copy of FILES #3. Although I'm sorry I missed out on the page, I'm glad to have the book in my collection. I'd about given up on getting anything signed by you guys since it seems you don't hit any of the conventions in the area. Are you planning on running another list of Terry's artwork for sale any time soon?

Sorry that Max had such trouble with BATMAN and had to drop the book. It's funny that everyone likes the character, but he seldom hangs on to a writer for very long. (Denny O'Neil and Mike Barr have probably had the longest tenures, but Denny was a long time ago and I'm not real fond of Barr's work.) Also, sometimes it seems that the Batman in BATMAN and the Batman in DETECTIVE and the Batman in WORLD'S FINEST and the Batman in JLA (and now JLI) are different characters. Englehart and Miller have probably made out the best, turning out a given number of quality stories and leaving the fans clamoring for more. Unfortunately you didn't even have the chance to do that.

On the up side, I like WILD DOG very much. While the phrase "positive role model" doesn't really pop into my head, the stories are well written and Terry's artwork looks better than ever (I should probably be telling this to Mike Gold). Also, the Dog is in situations where his kind of decisive action is more necessary than Ms. Tree's killing.

Just a quick note on an old and tired subject. I finally picked up the issue with the first half of "Runaway" and I can't see what the furor in the lettercol was about. From some of the letters, I expected pages of Billy Bob drooling over young boys, but really he's a minor character in the story. Also, he's not a homosexual as much as a pervert and psychopath, totally different classifications. If the letter writers were basing their arguments on the kid in the student union who refers to Billy Bob as a "faggot" or whatever, I don't think this means his sexual preference was well known at the school (B.Q.O.C.?). He probably acted a little weird and this kid called anybody he didn't like a faggot. That's the reading I got.

Gee, I guess that wasn't such a quick note after all. Oh well, thanks again for the book and good luck with WILD DOG.

Marty Golia, HARTSDALE, NY

Marty, I've just finished researching serial killers, specifically John Wayne Gacy, in relation to a novel I've been working on (BUTCHER'S DOZEN, the second Eliot Ness novel, due from Bantam next year). Let me assure you and all our readers that the "Billy Bobs" of this world are not "faggots" or straights, either. They are monsters - human monsters, but monsters. Gacy was a bisexual who shared a bed with his wife above the very crawl-space where his victims were stowed. He was also very big in the local Chamber of Commerce. The next Gacy may be sitting next to you in the movie show, or at a Federation of Decency meeting at your local library.

Dear Editor or Author:

Every August 10 (Dad/Todd's birthday), the Clark Family picks its twelve favorite comic book series for the preceding year.

The 1987 winners are.

1. Scout
2. Psi-Force
3. Love and Rockets
4. Ms. Tree
5. Batman
6. Green Arrow The Longbow Hunters
7. Badger
8. The New Mutants
9. The Question
10. The Puma Blues
11. ESPers
12. Young All-Stars

Congratulations on your title making the list! Keep up the good work!

Todd, Nancy, Dylan, Lyric, Leland, Melody,
Yvonne, X, and Shaman Clark, BUTLER, PA

What an amazing coincidence! Terry and I just compiled our list of our top ten readers! Here it is:

1. Todd Clark
2. Nancy Clark
3. Dylan Clark
4. Lyric Clark
5. Melody Clark
6. Yvonne Clark
7. X Clark
8. Shaman Clark
9. T.E. Pouncey
10. Joshua Blimes

Congratulations on making the list, gang, and keep up the good work! And Naomi J - better luck next year.

Dear Max and Terry.

I was very moved by Terry's message in the loc of issue #39. You guys have been doing a lot of good work. If you don't get the financial remunerations that you so richly deserve, you should at least be rich in the appreciation of your readers. You are, at least from this quarter. I am enclosing a check for \$500. I know this isn't much for starters, but if other readers make similar donations, you will be in the black in no time.

Let's talk about the format change. I'm in favor of the new format like the MORISI art and am glad that you are giving us a chance to see these forgotten classics. So far the plots haven't been anything special, but the heroin niece piece was interesting and I believe you, Max, that they get better as we head deeper into pre-code material. It's a pity that you don't have the original art. I'm sure MORISI's beautiful inks are not being shown in their best light but you can't have everything.

I hope your circulation doesn't suffer too much from the new format. However, good riddance to a few of the old-lady whiners in the letter column. Would they prefer that MS TREE was filled with 12 pages of letter column? I hope they read Terry's message before they left. I think it's pretty stupid to buy comics by the page instead of by the quality. I didn't mind (much) paying \$3 bucks for a single chapter of "Ms. Tree" in Eclipse Magazine back in the old days (I never got into any of the other strips). Besides which, I think both "Ms. Tree" and "Johnny Dynamite" are interesting and quality productions, so even by the page, I figure I'm getting my money's worth.

I found a couple old issues of Charlton's PETER CANNON, THUNDERBOLT in a specialty shop. (For those of you who don't know, Peter Cannon is the Charlton inspiration of the Adrian Veidt character in Watchmen.) The story and art were both very good and signed by the pseudonym PAM which was unmistakably really MORISI. Somebody on ARPA-NET told me that MORISI used to be a NY cop and he used the pseudonym because he

wasn't supposed to be moonlighting for Charlton. Can you tell us more about MORISI and his other works in comics?

By the way, if my enthusiasm for "Ms. Tree" has waned a bit its not because of the new format, but rather because the plots are getting a little repetitive. Can we expect to see a Sly Stalone-type character in the upcoming "Runaway III"? Although the current story line has some new twists, it's yet another story about one of Ms. Tree's relatives getting blown away and her going out for revenge. Ms. Tree has so often been innovative (Ms. Tree the first hard-nosed woman PI, Ms. Tree prosecuted for murder, Ms. Tree pleads insanity, Ms. Tree abhors violence). The current plot lines just don't seem to me to be Ms. Tree at her best.

Another thing that is starting to bug me about Ms. Tree is the fact that all her friends and relatives keep getting blown away. It used to be that Ms. Tree was the type of person that I would have liked to know personally, but now I'm not so sure any more. If I did know her, your readers would soon be reading "The Case of the Murdered Comic Fan" (or have you already done that one).

As far as the art goes, the covers have been great lately. The inside art is good too, but I miss the old Eclipse Ms. Tree whose face still graces the letter column. She was cuter in those days. As the character hardens so have the lines in her face. A pity.

I suppose if Ms. Tree is going to be a hard-nosed PI, she has to be a pretty tough cookie, but I'd like to see more of her tender side. You hardly ever see it except with Mike Jr. As a regular reader, I know there are many reasons why Ms. Tree's love life has been a little empty lately. Her relationship with Glenn Harwood seems trying at best and that insurance salesman seemed a real dud to me. If Ms. Tree was a male PI, she would be constantly flirting with her secretary and have a different lover each case. This would be hard to do with a female PI because in our society women aren't supposed to be as "promiscuous" as men. I think that the difficulty in inverting the cliché is exactly why it could be an interesting area for Max to explore.

As for Barb's solution to the Mike Mist mystery contest, I cry foul! Her solution was about twice as long as the Mist solutions normally print. I thought part of the problem was to make it read like a real Mist solution.

As you suggested when you answered my last letter, I did try several of your books, Max. I read TRUE DETECTIVE, TRUE CRIME and one of the Quarry books and enjoyed them all especially the first two for the skillful way you tie historical details into the mystery. I trust you won't mind if I recommend them to your other readers. Especially those of you who liked the new movie the Untouchables should check out TRUE CRIME. I liked the movie a lot, but I suspect, Max, that you didn't care much for it because of the historical liberties it took. From TRUE CRIME, I thought that Nitti lived a long time after Capone's incarceration. Is this true? Were there other glaring incongruities in the movie?

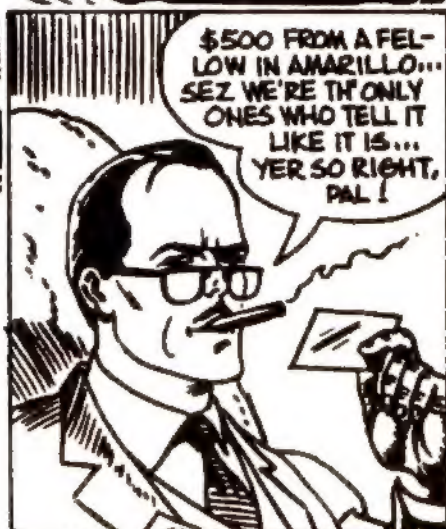
When are we going to see "Sarge Steel" come out over at DC? Will Giordano be doing the art? I hope he pencils at least one issue.

Paul Linhardt, ALISTON, MA

*Paul, those greedy postal workers stole the \$500 out of your letter; would you mind sending another five cee's? I think you'll agree "Coming of Rage" is in the great tradition of oddball MS TREE continuities. "Like Father" has been planned since almost the beginning of the feature - I admit I would have preferred to have more space to tell the story, but life ain't perfect, and neither are Beatty and Collins (well, Beatty, anyway). Were there historical inaccuracies in THE UNTOUCHABLES? Is Bismarck a her-ning? If you want the straight skinny on Frank Nitti, latch immediately-if-not-sooner onto a copy of the third Nathan Heller novel, THE MILLION-DOLLAR WOUND, available right now in paperback from TOR. As for "Sarge Steel," I have reluctantly bowed out of that project, so that other, more personal projects (like MS TREE) would not suffer. But it **will** be done, and most likely drawn by the talented Mr. Giordano. Perhaps I'll have time to do the **second** "Sarge Steel" mini-series.*

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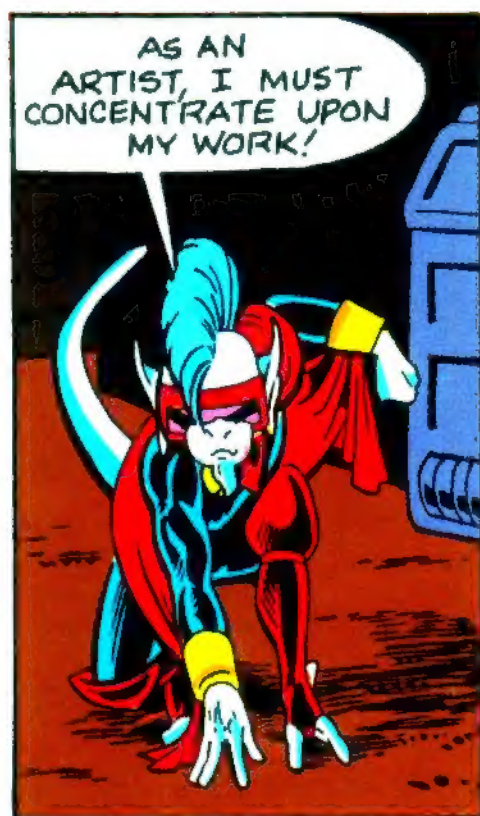
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